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ABSTRACT

The teaching activities presented in this pamphlet focus on spelling. The pamphlet begins with a discussion of the relationship between spelling and writing. Following that, it describes a language experience approach and its implications, the benefits of daily writing, and the kind of writing that allows a successful spelling program to operate. The next section, "A K-6 Approach," discusses ways teachers can develop children's ability to spell, how a writing program can help primary children to spell, additional activities, how to help children in need of remedial spelling, and how to teach spelling. The following section, "Spelling Practices," deals with what children can do if they need a word, providing an appropriate class dictionary, and the treatment of errors. The concluding section describes the spelling discussion, in which the teacher deals with the strengths and weaknesses of the children on an individual level. (EL)

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Spelling in the Total Language Program

Judy Turner

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SPELLING in the Total Language Program

SPELLING AND WRITING BELONG TOGETHER. To keep spelling away from writing is to deprive children of the relevance, the experimentation that leads to discovery and constant practice in an interesting situation that leads to learning. It is a tragedy if children grow to avoid any form of writing just because they think they are "bad" spellers. Learning spelling separately from writing must be like learning music theory without playing music. What's the point and where's the enjoyment?

This P.E.N. looks at spelling
- as a development process
- as a tool which is inseparable from writing.

Integrated with the language experience approach, spelling can no longer be treated as an isolated subject.

Examples of children's writing show that mis-spellings have a great deal to tell us about children's ability to spell. They give us clear directions which teachers should follow, signs that should not be ignored.

Correctness is not the one and only consideration. The application of children's understanding of spelling to predict new words, their ability to help themselves and to look up reference material **and** their confident attitude towards writing — all are valued in the classroom.

The K-6 approach described in this PEN is **not** one which leaves spelling to chance, unguided. Essential to its success is the spelling discussion between child and teacher. Practical suggestions are included to improve children's spelling ability and to help the teacher implement an effective spelling program.

A LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

"Start with expressive writing."

How Does Writing Daily Help Children To Learn To Spell?

1. Children give increasing attention to the **details** of words.
2. They are **thinking actively** about words — making choices, checking their work, looking for words not known.
3. They acquire and practise the skills of **looking up words** in a word list or dictionary.
4. They **help other children** to spell, and in turn receive help.
5. They write **many more words** than would be covered in a weekly "spelling list", at the same time giving most practice to the everyday words, the ones they will need most.
6. They **understand why** they need to try to spell well because of their own needs and the requirements of publication, not in order to obtain a "score" or a reward.
7. They acquire a **positive attitude** towards spelling. There is no hint of failure, only a growing confidence in their own ability to write words which express and communicate their ideas.
8. They **master the concepts of print,** e.g. left-to-right sequence, space between words etc.
9. They **gain control** of their own handwriting.

What Kind of Writing Allows a Successful Spelling Program To Operate?

It is essential that children be allowed to write as freely as they can. There is no place for stilted language or the reproduction of other people's ideas. The teacher must be able to observe what each child can and cannot accomplish when writing. Seeing what mistakes a child is making enables effective diagnosis to be made and appropriate action to be planned.

The first task is to encourage children to write in natural, expressive language, i.e. the language in which they talk. Other forms of writing, poetic and transactional, follow.

1. **Provide as many interesting first-hand experiences as possible.**
2. **Give children the opportunity to write daily while their thoughts are fresh.**
3. Plan stimulating programs to enrich children's language, e.g. a wide range of stories and poems presented in many different ways.

First-Hand Experiences and Writing Case Study of Six-years-old Jason.

Let us have a look at the development of Jason's writing and the importance of first-hand experiences.
(Note: Jason had followed a **Breakthrough** program in kindergarten.)

July

(i) I (watched) my brother Paul play (at Swansea. Paul's friend number 13 played for Swansea). Jason wrote only the part not in brackets.

(ii) My dog Mandy is a girl.

(iii) My dad is going to Canberra.

August

I went to Boat Harbour and wen we got there we had a game of football.
"wen" was his first attempt to make up his own word.

October

I have a bike and I can ride it and it has not any brakes.
Up to this stage Jason needed quite a bit of help from his teacher.

November

(i) yesterday peter caught a frog and it was a tree frog and it was green and then he let it go and pAul caught it and then he askt mum if I cood have a dish and then mandy was biting the frog.

(ii) My dog got ran over her leg by my grandad and rfter school my grandad and mum and my granma o came to pick Me and Paul rfter school and then we toock took Mandy to the vet and she hadto stay in for a culdays and she Mit be cumeing home today and we mist her a lot and mum will probll ring the vet up today and Mandy Mit be cumeing home today.

An event such as this can be described as "a breakthrough to spelling". In the next few weeks, in other stories, Jason wrote exersis (exercise), pikanik (picnic), porperse (porpoise), snorcl (snorkel), stashn (station), berendu (vernadah), nashnl (national) and axl self-corrected to axerdely (accidently).

NOTE: Not all children make spelling progress in the same way. However, **observation** of the development of children's writing, along with their spelling, offers the best way of understanding how each child is developing in spelling and of knowing how best to help him/her make further progress.

Implications From Jason's Writing

1. An **experience** affected Jason's writing most of all. It affected his feelings and his desire to express what happened. It *urged* him to communicate. So intent was he to write about his beloved labrador Mandy being hurt that he had no time to ask his teacher for any help with words.
Implication: Provide experiences which involve children, arouse their emotions, stir their senses, excite them to communicate. More than anything else, an experience of importance to a child has the greatest impact on his/her writing, resulting in better quality and quantity.

2. Jason had not been given a traditional spelling program — no weekly word lists or dictation — yet he developed the ability to spell well.
Implication: Encourage children to write daily and to be responsible for their own learning. Be patient.

3. Jason learnt to write freely, to tackle new words with confidence and to spell with a satisfying degree of success.
Implication: Encourage expressive writing; be willing to accept invented spelling and discuss children's spelling, on the spot, with them.

A K-6 APPROACH

Does This Mean Spelling Will Just "Happen" if Children Write Every Day?

It was a mistake of the "creative writing" era to allow children to write with complete freedom. This practice did a great disservice to expressive writing. Similarly, it is not enough just to let spelling "happen". It is the teacher's responsibility to observe how children spell and, on the basis of this knowledge, to improve each child's spelling appropriate to his/her level of ability.

How Can Teachers Develop Children's Ability to Spell?

1. Encourage children to "have a go" at reproducing the word they have asked for without merely copying. Train children to look at words intently and intentionally — with every intention of remembering and being able to reproduce them (training in serial probability).
2. Provide opportunities for reinforcing visual imagery/word patterns.
3. Develop children's ability to hear and discriminate between sounds.
4. Encourage clear articulation.
5. Encourage clear, efficient handwriting.
6. Encourage talking and listening
7. Encourage carefulness.
8. Foster in children a positive self-image.
9. Develop the practice of proof-reading and self-checking.
10. Teach dictionary skills.
11. Encourage finger tracing and chalkboard writing as a further sensory aid to memory.
12. Train children in the practice of the LOOK/COVER/WRITE/CHECK method.
13. Display lots of published work around the classroom — in clear writing with correct spelling.
14. Display word banks, groups, lists etc. at eye level or store in well-organised accessible boxes, shelves etc. Encourage active use of these on a self-help basis.
15. Widen children's audience, highlighting the importance of excellence of the finished product and worthwhile reasons for producing best work. An example would be an exchange of letters, and visits if possible, with children at another school or with an elderly citizens group.

What About Primary Children and Spelling?

As children proceed through the primary grades teachers should continue to analyse the kind of spelling that is revealed in the children's writing. How they can meet the needs of each child can be illustrated by a study of samples of writing by Joshua in Year 4.

In March he wrote imaginatively about being "Trapped in Time", of going back to have exciting adventures in the Aboriginal Dreamtime. It was obvious that he had been encouraged to express his feelings and ideas as part of a positive writing program.

1. In his 260 word story there are 40 errors. These include gatherb, killbe, appeard, bown, hab and five more similar mis-spellings. He managed hapened and four other correct **ed** endings. However, his writing clearly showed that he needed to learn **ed** endings more thoroughly and to differentiate between **b** and **d**.

A sample story in April contains five errors with **ed** or **b/d**; here is a short letter he wrote in May:

Dear Scott,

I hope you can come with us to Sybney. On the May holibays. We will go to Luna Park and the Sydney Tower and going to Taronga Zoo, a we also will go rollr kateing and we will de staying at Bondie At my Grandmother's place

You goob friend
Joshua.

What is best for Joshua's spelling progress would not seem to come from a traditional spelling list.

2. When writing in March, Joshua used **they** six times and wrote it correctly. In April he used it four times and each time wrote thay. Writing from day to day reveals what words are known and what words are yet to be "fixed" and allows the time and practice for consolidation to occur.
3. In February Joshua wrote toka (took) and in March and April toke. If a word as commonly used as this is not checked, it may come to be accepted as correct.
4. There may also be omissions in a child's spelling repertoire. For example, in March Joshua wrote coclots (chocolates), punked (punched) and in April carg (charge). It appears that he just didn't know ch. If this remains undetected he is likely to make a mistake every time he has to write any word containing ch.

Children's writing reveals their understandings about words and their application of all they know about spelling. Writing over a period of time shows which words children use most, which words they consistently remember and where they are having difficulties. Their mis-spellings are signals for where they need help most.

An expanding writing program will encourage experiences which lead to many kinds of writing and the use of different styles. Children will write letters, reports, surveys, journals etc. They will use language to persuade, to dramatise, to describe etc. in settings that are real or imagined. In so doing they will not be confined to their everyday vocabulary. Wider experiences will broaden their oral language, their written language and consequently their spelling.

Additional activities can include:

1. Personal dictionaries.
2. "Tickle" box, containing "Words I Know" written on cards arranged in alphabetical order.
3. Words, *words* and **more words** around the classroom — they might be for alliteration, opposites, for similar meanings, anagrams etc.

   Collect and list words:
   - with similar beginnings (e.g. triangle, triple, tricycle).
   - with similar endings (e.g. biology, geology, ecology)
   - from other countries (e.g. cafe, kindergarten)
4. Activities using Roget's *Thesaurus*.
5. Doing or making up crosswords.
6. *Scrabble*.
7. Draw a grapevine to which leaves are added as words are treated — word groups, interest words, topic words etc.
8. *Lego* alphabet board.

Some of these activities may be more related to language development, or to the extension of bright children. They still provide handy reference material in the room for children writing.

Treated in interesting ways, words can be fun!

Children's spelling will not be much use to them unless they write confidently and easily and with independence. Let us not have children "*to whom spelling remains a mystery, who are not free to write without backward glances, and who sadly stick to such words as 'nice' because they have learned that to adventure into new and strange words and phrases carries the threat of the teacher's red pencil . . . The competent speller is the confident speller who will write adventurously, at ease in the control of the medium*". Margaret Peters.

What About Children in Need of Remedial Spelling?

Highly commended, particularly for primary children having difficulty, is *Diagnostic and Remedial Spelling Manual* by

Margaret Peters. Rather than giving more of the same, she offers a very positive approach aimed at prevention rather than cure.

Another book *Curly or Nobody can Teach You How-to-Spell; You Have to Do Your Own Learning* by H. R. Hopkins stresses the value of learning spelling through writing. It is also highly recommended.

Does This Mean Each Child in the Class is Doing Different Spelling?

Teachers may shudder at the thought of each child learning to spell different words. Yet look how reading and writing, when carried out on an individual basis, have become alive and rewarding for children. The same can happen with spelling. It does not require the teacher to devise and teach a separate list of spelling words for each child. What it does is show children **how to learn.**

Children participate voluntarily, and, through their own needs and interests, they are engaged in self-help, predicting, checking, discovery and practice. This is a **process,** a way of learning which makes children responsible for their own learning. The teacher is a facilitator, not a prescriber, and is able to spend more time discussing, writing and spelling with the children. [PEN 36 *Teaching Spelling in the New Context* looks at the spelling process and spelling program options.]

SPELLING PRACTICES

How Can Writing/Spelling Learning Take Place in the Classroom?

1. What Can Children Do If They Need a Word?

- They can write it straight into their story as they think the word may be spelt.
- They can try it out on paper or in a small book provided for this purpose. Then they can choose which form of the word "looks right" or they can ask, say, "Is this how you spell **escalator?**" Rather than being given the word by the teacher, they have *thought* about the word and *predicted* the letters likely to be in it.
- They can ask the teacher or a friend. Again, it is better for them to work out the word as much as possible. For example:

  John: "How do you write **all?**"
  Teacher: "Can you write **ball?**"
  Teacher: "If I cover **b**, what word is it?"
  (John knows!)
- They can consult a dictionary, a word list, a book or any material in the room where they think the word might be located.

In other words, writing stories gives children valuable practice in predicting:

"In learning spelling we are learning a code. We are learning the probability of certain letters coming together in a particular sequence. . . serial probability."
Margaret Peters

We learn to spell by:

"predicting spelling when we are not sure and getting feedback when it is appropriate. Predicting possible spelling is important. Unless we can do this we cannot use a dictionary."
Chrystine Bouffler.

2. Provide an Appropriate Class Dictionary

The single, most useful aid this writer has used in the classroom is a simple "home-made" word list.

- It solves the problem of "30 children wanting 30 words".
- It saves time for the teacher.
- It enables children, even six-year-olds, to carry on writing independently.

A child locates the appropriate page (card, etc) on which the word may be found, the teacher only has to point to it and the child can write the word. Very soon the child becomes familiar with alphabetical order and finds words independently. Children of any grade find this method useful and time-saving. It leads naturally to the use of dictionaries.

NOTE: Margaret Peters recommends that children write words without copying, i.e. they should "look at words with every intention of remembering and being able to reproduce them". Therefore, encourage children to look very carefully at the word and then attempt to write it from memory.

Topic books can be made up when a theme is being treated e.g. *Local History, Circus, Food* etc. The interest words in these serve as useful references when the children are writing.

3. How Can Errors Be Treated?

1. Praise children for words they have mastered, for finding words independently and for making a good, even if unsuccessful, attempt at a word.
2. Encourage children to proof-read and to correct words they notice are wrong.
3. Encourage children to indicate words which **they** think may be wrong and get them to find and write them correctly from the class dictionary (with the intention of remembering).
4. Do *not* mark errors in red.
5. Talk about errors with the children in a constructive way using an eraser to make changes that are being discussed.
6. Give children *SPECIFIC SPELLING PRACTICE.*

In learning spelling through writing there will be times when children mis-spell words that the teacher considers they should know. Obviously the teacher's expectations will be different according to the ability of each child, e.g. Susan may need **like,** Ian could learn **arrangement.**

- The teacher and child together decide on words to be written in child's spelling practice book.
- The children practise the word a number of times using the LOOK/COVER/WRITE/CHECK method.
- It is worthwhile getting the children to write their words on the class chalkboard, or individual chalkboards if available. They write the words from memory, adding their own name. The teacher who may be busy discussing children's writing individually or with a group can see at a glance if children have practised and remembered their word's correctly.
- Sometimes children can work in pairs at a chalkboard or on paper or books, testing each other on the last five/ten words.

***Dictation** seems a waste of time when children are learning spelling through their own efforts, to satisfy their own needs. Time is better spent in allowing children to engage in their own writing.*

THE SPELLING DISCUSSION

Talking about children's spelling with them is important. The teacher can help children to:

— look up words
— suggest a correction
— think of other words in the same word group
— find the word or a word like it on a chart in the room
— proof-read with care

All of this encourages children to think actively about what and how they write. All of this is training children to assume responsibility for their own learning.

Spelling discussions depend on knowing the children as individuals and treating them accordingly.

Understanding Children as Individuals

The teacher is aware of the individual characteristics of each child:

• **JILL** is an impulsive writer who writes with speed and enjoyment but also with lack of care — yet if she slows down when writing she may halt her flow of ideas. However, she needs to **proof-read** with care so that she can detect her mistakes.

• **KAY** is a natural speller, an avid reader from a home environment rich in books. She enjoys the challenge of difficult words and copes easily with extension work.

• **BRETT**, though strong in oral language, is very slow to organise his thoughts and put them on paper. It helps him to talk about his story first. He needs to achieve a desirable standard in the speed and formation of his handwriting.

• **JAMIE** is careful, neat and likes to be correct. He does most of his learning before he writes, checking words from the word list before putting them on paper. He depends more on sight words. As with most of the class, he needs the enrichment of lots of stories and poems. Some stimulating experiences will help him to write more spontaneously. However, his mother reports that he enjoys writing at home and often sends letters.

What Actually Happens in a Spelling Discussion?

A spelling discussion should always be positive and constructive. The teacher uses discretion in deciding how many errors should be corrected. The children should be involved in this choice, since they need to feel responsibility for their own writing and spelling. Considerations will include:

— whether the story will be published
— the ability of the child
— the attitude of the child — too many corrections can be discouraging
— whether the words are likely to be referred to and used in the future

A look at Jacob's story about a praying mantis shows the possibilities:

The Praying mantis
a praying mantis jumpt on my bak samwun braing it to school we poot it in a buckert it has shrp back legs

(a) **jumpt:** "Although this sounds right, we really write **jumped**". (Use an eraser and change as this is explained.) Jacob decides to practise in his spelling book **jump, jumped.** The teacher might suggest **bump, bumped** to reinforce this example (getting Jacob to say how to spell **bumped** before writing it) or **pick, picked** might be chosen to strengthen his understanding of **ck.**

(b) **bak, buckert, back:** Jacob could be praised for the correct spelling of **back** and for the correct use of **ck** in **buckert.** If asked whether the first attempt **bak** is right, Jacob would be able to correct it without any trouble. The erasure of **r** to make **bucket** would quickly make it correct, accompanied by praise for a very good effort.

(c) **samwun** and **poot** can be remedied by Jacob himself as he can look them up in the word list.

(d) **braing: i** can be removed. The teacher may mention that **brought** is the correct word and may choose to write it if the work is for publication.

(e) **shrp:** When Jacob picks out **ar** on the classroom sounds wallchart the omission can easily be added. A group of **ar** words suggested by Jacob could be chosen for his spelling practice.

From these possibilities:

(i) The teacher would choose the ones most appropriate for Jacob.

(ii) On some occasions there may be a discussion, without any words being put into Jacob's spelling book.

(iii) Jacob needs to develop his memory of sight words. He will be encouraged to make more use of his word list when writing (not copying, but with the intention of remembering).

(iv) If **jumped** is chosen for his spelling practice his teacher will watch his subsequent writing: will he remember **ed** or will he need quite a few more reminders?

Additional spelling practice does not *have* to be on an individual basis. Knowing the children, the teacher can easily withdraw a group needing extra work in the formation of words, e.g. adding **ed** additional handwriting **skills/extension work etc.**

TIME AND ORGANISATION

Learning spelling while writing can only happen in a classroom where daily writing takes place in an accepting atmosphere — a classroom where talking, listening, reading and writing (and **spelling**) happen naturally and spontaneously in a truly integrated way.

In such a classroom there is recognition that children work in different ways, that they finish at different times, and that some need more help than others. Not all children are doing the same thing at the same time; some may be reading, some engrossed in writing, others preparing work for publication.

Teachers allow for this by:

- providing work for children to go on with
- organising tasks on a contract basis
- checking off children after a task is completed or when a conference has taken place
- seeing different groups on different days
- having parents coming in to assist.

EVALUATION

The monitoring of children's progress when conventional *spelling lists* and *dictation* were used was a simple matter — children were either right or wrong. Spelling age tests could also be applied.

To evaluate the performance of children *learning spelling through writing* is different. Here *correctness* is only part of the picture. Through writing, children can reveal such things as:

- their ability to remember words
- their knowledge of sounds
- the degree to which they can predict the likelihood of certain letters to form words
- their dictionary skills
- their efficiency and speed in writing words
- their care and accuracy
- their ability to proof-read
- their attitudes towards writing, e.g. their willingness to write even if they are poor spellers.

A look at this list includes abilities that are on many check-lists teachers have for writing. For this reason a check-list for communicating probably provides the simplest record of children's progress while allowing for the skills which go across subject areas.

Keep Dated Samples of Children's Writing

Samples of work often provide the best record of children's progress. The teacher can write on these to indicate the step forward which has occurred, e.g. "Craig didn't ask for any help" or "Joan knows **puppy/puppies**" or "Ben used the dictionary". Records like these are very useful when children's work is being discussed with parents.

PARENTS AND SPELLING

It is the responsibility of teachers to discuss with parents changes in education and the reasons for the changes. More than any other "subject" the teaching of spelling has been marked by a sameness, a dullness and a separateness from other curriculum areas. Parents who, for the first time, see **invented spellings** (especially **uncorrected** invented spellings) feel concerned. Fears can be allayed and support offered when there are parent-teacher discussions about the development of language and the integrated nature of talking, listening, reading, writing and, now, **spelling**.

What Can Parents Do to Help Children with Spelling?

1. **Encourage children to write** often, without censure, to different people — on cards, stationary, notepads etc.
2. **Write to your own children.** Write notes with messages or for fun or to tell them you care. Send letters, postcards, notes if you are away from home.
3. **Write with children.** Sit at the table and write your letters while the children are writing theirs. This is how Curly learnt to spell. (See References).
4. **Read, read, read** to children and encourage them to read — books, magazines, poems, newspapers etc. Read signs on shops, read different kinds of printing.
5. **Homework can be different:**
   - Play *Scrabble*.
   - Find all the objects in your house that start with certain letters.
   - Margaret Peters suggests a television game to aid visual memory. Watch a television advertisement, then write down remembered words seen on the screen (include brand names).
   - Play *Memory*.
   - Learn how to use the telephone directory (white *and* yellow pages). Ask each other to find out certain information.
   - How many words in a newspaper article end with, say, **ation,** or have **er** in them?
   - Play *Boggle*.
   - How many smaller words can you make out of the letters of, say, **Constantinople?**

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